



# SINI 4 Spotlight

Volume 2 Number 3

November 2011

*Who'd have thought it possible . . .* that we'd have snow before daylight saving time ends???? Mother Nature sure has had a target on New England this year. I hope she soon decides to head south and leave us be for the foreseeable future.

Hopefully you're beginning to enjoy the benefits of the rich, candid conversations among your staff as you examine your own practices against the indicators of effective practice in the Steps to Success tool. Change doesn't require a fully defined action plan or even permission from those in charge – it just requires thoughtful individuals committed to giving their best effort in the service of their students. Knowing what that best effort ought to look like is the critical starting point for the change process.

This issue of *Spotlight* focuses on making best use of the *Wise Ways* to learn which organizational structures and instructional practices have demonstrated effectiveness in rapidly improving and high performing schools. The FAQs list grows, with a response to a question about using Survey Monkey to assess the indicators. Finally, for the eager beavers among you who are completing your self-assessment, there is an outline of the "what next" part of your process. Those who like to keep the "end in mind" will find it helpful to log in to see some examples of completed action plans for several indicators for our fictional "Mt. Adams" Elementary School

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## Wise Uses for Wise Ways

The Wise Ways in Steps to Success (Indistar®) are not just handy helpers to refer to when you're stuck. They are *critical parts* of the self-assessment process, providing a detailed description of the instructional practices, organizational structures, and leadership actions that have demonstrated effectiveness in a variety of school settings where students are making rapid improvement.



When you follow the guidance in the document, *Practice Assessing an Indicator*, you instruct the staff to read the Wise Way for the indicator they are assigned to assess. The staff asks,

- Do we use this practice in the way that highly effective schools do?
- Is this practice in place in *all* our classrooms, by *all* our staff members?
- If we implemented this instructional practice (or organizational structure) in ways described in the Wise Ways, would we be better able to help our students succeed?

One approach using the Wise Ways to their full benefit is an adaptation of the 4A's protocol many of you may be familiar with. ([http://www.nsrharmony.org/protocol/doc/4\\_a\\_text.pdf](http://www.nsrharmony.org/protocol/doc/4_a_text.pdf)) Instructional Team leaders or representatives from grade level teams responsible for facilitating small group assessment of the indicators could use this protocol to conduct a brisk, efficient review of the Wise Way when assessing each indicator. Try it!

### The 4 A's protocol, modified for use with Wise Ways

**Purpose:** To help group members decide what information in the Wise Ways documents are important to consider in assessing the school's current practices

**Procedure:**

1. If possible, have group members read the Wise Ways before the meeting.
2. During their reading, ask them to think about each of the 4 A's questions –  
What **ASSUMPTIONS** underlie the research in the Wise Way?

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What do you **AGREE** with in the article?

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What would you **ARGUE** with in the Wise Way?

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What parts of the description of effective practice in the Wise Way **APPLIES** to OUR School?

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3. Go around the group and invite each member to share their thoughts.  
If time allows, invite sharing of each of the 4 A's.  
If time is short, focus on AGREE and APPLIES.
4. Summarize (or ask another member to summarize) what the group thinks is important when assessing YOUR SCHOOL practices against the effective practices summarized in the Wise Way.

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**REMINDER:** if you have hired a consultant to help you with your restructuring process and would like them to have coaching privileges, please send me their contact information (Name, email, phone, school) and I'll arrange to get the proper logins assigned.  
([Karenlaba@comcast.net](mailto:Karenlaba@comcast.net); [karen.laba@doe.nh.gov](mailto:karen.laba@doe.nh.gov))

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### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Over the course of the past two years, I've received a variety of inquiries asking for advice about how to conduct the work of assessing current practices and planning for improvement using the *Steps to Success* tool. Here are the answers to some of those questions.

#### Steps to Success FAQs

##### *B. Managing the Work*

*Q: A colleague made a suggestion to use Survey Monkey to gather staff input into our current level of implementation of each of the indicators. That seems like a quick way to involve all the staff in the conversation. What do you think?*

*A. I can appreciate the appeal of Survey Monkey but the Steps process is built on the principle that change happens as a result of candid collaborative conversations among the educators responsible for the work of the school. It's not a simple check-the-box collection of opinions or perceptions. Using Survey Monkey sidesteps the conversations about the Wise Ways descriptions of best practice compared with local practices. Teachers learn so much from each other when they enjoy the opportunity to have these discussions!*



*That said, I can envision that Survey Monkey could be a starting point if you brought the results of staff responses for an indicator to a group meeting, for instance indicator IIB04, Teachers individualize instruction . . . You could facilitate a lively discussion of the survey results among the whole staff or in grade level groupings and collect evidence of what really happens in classrooms during those discussions. That would be rich, valuable evidence of current level of implementation, which is what the system asks you to provide for each indicator.*

*Another issue with the Survey Monkey approach is that each respondent may be interpreting the indicator differently. Remember: these indicators are based on studies of highly effective and rapidly improving schools. Each of the Wise Ways associated with each indicator describes what the practice looks like in a school considered exemplary.*

*During the assessment of each indicator, teams should be comparing their own practice to that described in the Wise Ways. If using Survey Monkey, each staff member would need to read each Wise Way in order to know what the indicator "looks like" in a school setting -- a daunting task!*

*If Steps to Success were a process that influenced the change process via a different mechanism, Survey Monkey might be a useful approach. As it is designed, though, a survey tool avoids the critical conversations that will lead to change.*

### **TO BE CONTINUED . . .**

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### **Moving from Assessing Current Practices to Creating a Plan**

Some of you are approaching completion of the "assessment" phase of the *Steps to Success* process. There are several steps I recommend before leaping directly into creating your plan. I am anticipating a January meeting of all the restructuring planning year schools to go over this guidance in person, but if you want to start soon, here's the general sequence and some suggested approaches.

#### **I: Check Your Work**

Just as we caution students to check their work before handing in an assignment, *Steps to Success* schools should pause and check their work before proceeding to craft goals and define plans. Checking your work is aimed at answering the question:

*Have we identified the instructional practices and organizational structures that are the **real barriers** to our students' success?*



Here's how:

On the [School Main](#) page, go to [REPORTS](#).

Select [Step 4: Indicators Included in Plan](#).

Sort by Index score by clicking on the arrow at the top of the [INDEX](#) column.

[EXPORT](#) and [Save](#) to distribute to your team members.

[Discuss](#) whether the index scores represent the true priority practices that present barriers to success in your school.

## **II. Cluster Similar Indicators**

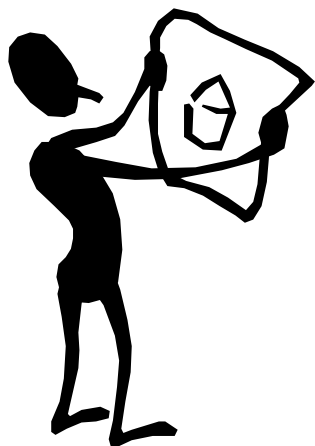
One likely outcome of the “check your work” activity is the emergence of apparent groups of similar indicators. That's great! In *Steps to Success*, indicators convert into [objectives](#) as you move into Step 5, and objectives are subsets of [goals](#). This step in your process asks you to examine objectives (indicators) that are similar. Following wise thinkers' advice to FOCUS your work, aim for [no more than](#) 3 to 5 clusters. In the next part of the process, you'll write goals that reflect the intent and meaning of the [cluster](#) of objectives.

## **III. Identify “Main Idea” and “Supporting Details” Indicators (Objectives)**

In each cluster you create, there are some indicators (now phrased as ‘objectives’) that emerge as ‘main idea’ objectives. Others are more ‘supporting details’ that contribute to the main objective. Sort the objectives in each cluster according to whether they are ‘main idea’ or ‘supporting details’ objectives. You'll be writing detailed action plans for the main idea (high priority) objectives and you may choose to incorporate some of the supporting details objectives as TASKS in your plans.

The original guidance on the *Restructuring Planning Year Tasks and Timeline* document suggested that you should complete your assessment of current practices by the end of January. But the online tool allows for differentiation among you, so feel free to set your own pace. Call or email for advice as you move forward.

### **‘Mt. Adams’ Elementary School Sample Action Plans**



If you're interested in seeing what an action plan looks like in the *Steps to Success* online tool, I've created some examples for our fictitious ‘Mt. Adams’ School.

At the Indistar® login, enter [nhsample](#) and password [nhsample](#).

Move to the SCHOOL MAIN page.

In REPORTS, select INDICATORS CHECKLIST REPORT.

Check the box next to any or all of these indicators: IE06, IIA02, IIIA01, IIIC05.

Click REPORT and read, EXPORT or SAVE the action plan(s) to review later.



The contents of the action plan in Step 5 of *Steps to Success* will be familiar to you as the same contents you submitted for your previous SINI plans – activity (TASKS in Steps), person responsible, date for completion, resources, monitoring implementation and monitoring impact. We made the effort to retain what was important to the quality of your plans within the *Steps* tool.

One new piece of your action plan in the *Steps* system is question 2: *Describe what it will look like if this objective is fully implemented*. This is a powerful addition to the planning process and we'll spend time on it when we meet.

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I hope you find this newsletter helpful. Please contact me if you have suggestions for items to include in a future issue or recommendations for improvement. BE SURE to distribute this to your team members and others who might find this information useful. Thanks!

*Dr. Karen Laba, NH Consultant for School Improvement*

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**2011 SINI 4: Restructuring Planning Year Schools**

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